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ABSTRACT

A major goal of ESL education is to teach students how to speak English well enough to converse spontaneously and naturally with native speakers. Discourse analysis provides an understanding of those skills second language learners need to acquire to converse with native speakers and an understanding of how these skills may most beneficially be acquired. These skills are both linguistic and communicative. One way to combine them and to prepare ESL students to converse with native English speakers is to practice conversation, use conversational English, and introduce various conversational techniques. The focus of this report is to discuss: (1) aspects of conversational language, (2) pre-conversation activities, (3) passage from controlled to free conversation, and (4) conversation activities. Among the conversation activities included are roleplay, question-and-answer activities, class discussions, problem solving, games, and other group activities. A variety of sample exercises, dialogues, and suggested activities are included. A discussion of conversation in the classroom points out the importance of identification of teacher and student role. (JK)

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LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION: THEORY AND PRACTICE

38

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Teaching Conversation Skills in ESL

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and
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One of the major goals--if not the primary one--for all teachers of English as a second language, regardless of the nature of the ESL program, is to teach students how to speak English well enough to converse spontaneously and naturally with native speakers. The questions that immediately arise, of course, are, What are the skills second language learners need to acquire in order to converse with native speakers, and how do they learn them? Some answers may be found in an examination of some of the recent work done in the field of sociolinguistics, particularly in the area of discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis is based on the premise that language does not occur in isolation; it is dependent on social context. Rather than emphasizing the phoneme and the word as the basic units of language (as in structural linguistics), or the phrase and the sentence (as in transformational linguistics), discourse analysis focuses on linguistic units above the rank of clause and studies the sequence of these units.

Aspects of Conversational Language

Because discourse analysis examines "real" language or "natural" language (i.e., conversational language), its findings are of particular interest to ESL teachers who teach conversational skills. Studies show that native speakers do not always employ the perfectly complete sentences that are frequently used as language models for classroom teaching. In fact, Turano-Perkins (1979) indicates that as much as 44 percent of the utterances in a given conversation may be incomplete sentences: elliptical constructions lacking subjects ("Looks like rain, doesn't it?") or rejoinders ("Sure does," "Me, too," or "Not now, thanks"). Furthermore, Americans seldom use short answers such as "Yes, I am" or "No, it isn't"; they are more likely to respond to questions with a rejoinder that provides additional information:

A: Do you want to go to the movies tonight?
B: Sure. What's on?
A: Dracula. Have you seen it?
B: Yes, but I'd like to see it again.
A: Can you get the car?
B: No, we'll have to take the bus.

Inserting the standard short answers into this exchange (as many ESL textbooks direct students to do) makes it sound stilted and incomplete:

A: Do you want to go to the movies tonight?
B: Yes, I do.
A: Dracula is playing. Have you seen it?
B: Yes, I have.
A: Would you like to see it again?
B: Yes, I would.
A: Can you get the car?
B: No, I can't.
A: Then I guess we'll have to take the bus.

By responding with "textbook" answers, "B" sounds like some kind of automaton, while "A" is the only one who keeps the conversation moving.

Discourse analysis also reveals that in conversational English, a question is not necessarily followed by an answer. Merritt (1976) and Goffman (1976) indicate that in certain situations, particularly when one is asking for service or making a request, a question can often be followed by another question, rather than by a predictable short answer:

Customer: Do you have coffee to go?
Server: Cream and sugar? (starts to pour coffee)
Customer: Cream only.
Server: O.K. (putting cream in)

A: Can I borrow your hose?
B: Do you need it this very moment?
A: No.
B: Yes.

The language of conversation is often quite simple; much of it is formulaic, automatic, rehearsed, and filled with clichés (Fillmore 1976, Sharpe):

A: How are you?
B: Fine. How are you?

A: Have a nice day.
B: You too.

It is this aspect of conversation that may well lend itself to pattern practice and repetitive dialogues.

But conversation, because it is a social activity, can be as diverse and subtle as its participants. It can contain numerous social and contextual factors as well as pragmatic presuppositions. Goffman (1976) offers this example:

A: How are you?
B: Hi.

In this exchange a question is not being asked, and an answer is not being provided. The social situation simply calls for some perfunctory greeting from each speaker.

The language of conversation is also determined by matters of social style or level. Hymes (1964) has noted that probably every society has at least three style levels: formal or polite, colloquial, and slang or vulgar. However, most ESL textbooks based on audiolingual theory introduce only the formal or polite style. Although some ESL textbooks are beginning to use the colloquial style (especially those books designed for adult education and "survival skills" programs), very few textbooks employ the slang or vulgar style. (One notable exception is Claire's Dangerous English [1980].)

It was formerly believed that multiple stylistic levels were characteristic only of formalized cultures such as those in the Orient. Jacobson (1976), however, suggests that English allows for at least five stylistic possibilities:

Style A: Peer's style
Style B: Formal style
Style C: Style appropriate for small children or when addressing them, that is, an adult's style comprehensible to small children (not necessarily baby talk)
Style D: Informal style appropriate when talking to a close member of one's family
Style E: Informal style appropriate when talking to an adult who is not a member of the family

In the following example, Jacobson illustrates the use of the five styles: Two college students meet and discuss a party (Style A); a college professor approaches them to cancel his conference (Style B); one student's baby brother runs toward his older brother and talks with him briefly (Style C); their mother joins the group to speak with her older son at first (Style D) and with his friend later on (Style E).

While the characters in this illustration do indeed employ five different stylistic levels in a short period of time, they make the transition from one style to another with relative ease. This process--called switching--is controlled by conditions of cultural appropriateness or "decorum" (Fowler 1974).

In addition to all its other aspects, then, conversation is culture-bound. What people say in a conversation, how they say it, when they say it, and what gestures they use to reinforce their verbal utterances are all governed by cultural constants or formulas that determine such matters as how to disagree, how to apologize, how to take turns in a conversation, how close to stand or sit, when to make or avoid eye contact, how to interrupt a speaker, how to make a request, how much volume to use, which gestures to use, which gestures to avoid, which words to

avoid, when to remain silent, or how to terminate a conversation. These are but a few of the many aspects of conversation, verbal and nonverbal, that are culturally determined.

These and other sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic theories developed over the past two decades have pointed out the discrepancies between the language patterns that are suggested in many textbooks and the language that is actually used by native English speakers in ordinary social encounters. Therefore, psycholinguists, sociolinguists, and ESL teachers have begun to make a distinction between linguistic competence (knowing the phonology and structures of a language) and communicative competence (knowing how, when--and when not--to use the learned structures in real-life situations) (Paulston 1974).

The skills that a second language learner needs in order to converse freely and effectively with native speakers include both linguistic skills and communicative skills. One of the ways to combine the two types of skills and to prepare ESL students to converse with native English speakers is to practice conversations, to use conversational English, and to introduce various conversational techniques.

The Conversation Act

Conversation is the meaningful spoken exchange of ideas, information, or feelings. A conversation, by its very definition, must involve two or more persons. The word "exchange" indicates that conversation is at least a two-way process. It is not a monologue, a speech, an oral report, or a recitation. There must be a sender and a receiver in order for ideas, information, or feelings to be communicated. But if one person does all the sending, and the receiver makes no meaningful verbal response, there is no exchange, thus no conversation.

Second, there must be a true communication of ideas, information, or feelings. Conversation is not the repetition or manipulation of sounds, words, phrases, or sentences. Pattern practice and substitution drills do not constitute conversation. Although such activities may generate spontaneous conversation in the classroom, they are not in and of themselves conversation.

Third, in order for meaningful communication of ideas, information, or feelings to take place, the speakers must share certain basic assumptions about the social context in which they are speaking. The degree of communication in a conversation is dependent upon certain shared values and unspoken assumptions (Gumperz 1975). If the speakers are from two different cultures, therefore, cross-cultural misinterpretations may present significant barriers to successful communication. The speakers must be consciously or unconsciously aware of both the verbal and the nonverbal signals they are exchanging and how these signals will be interpreted by others if meaningful communication is to transpire.

From Research to Practice

Recent studies by psycholinguists, sociolinguists, and TESL methodologists provide helpful suggestions to teachers who want to incorporate "real" language or to employ a conversation mode of teaching in the ESL classroom.

Contrary to popular belief, not all classroom language is "real" language. Gaies (1977), for example, indicates that the language ESL teachers typically use in their classrooms is characteristic of the language that adults use in their interactions with children. Furthermore, the model dialogues presented in many ESL textbooks are not truly representative of the normal flow of conversation (Lezburg and Hilferty 1978). If their teachers and textbooks present only a formal, precise model of language, ESL students may have difficulty making the transition from classroom language to conversations outside the classroom, which vary greatly in style and content.

To switch from formal language to "real" language in the ESL class is no small task. It requires two major changes: (1) a change in the style of language used by the teacher and the students as well as the style of language presented in the teaching materials; and (2) a change in teaching approach.

Since many ESL textbooks present only the formal or polite style of language as a model, teachers who want their students to use real language must either switch to a textbook that focuses on real language or supplement their present textbook by writing their own teaching materials. Morley (1979) advises teachers not to be dependent on the textbook alone for language models and learning activities if they are not satisfied with the approach, the examples, or the exercises it presents. To give a simple example, Devine (1977) suggests that teachers replace such bland textbook model sentences as "There is a pen on the table" with totally absurd examples such as "There is a horse in the bathtub." Although both sentences illustrate the same structure, it is the second one, according to Devine, that students will most likely remember. And it is this type of sentence that will encourage student interaction.

The change in teaching approach involves moving from teacher-centered activities to group-centered activities. Students should be encouraged to converse not only with their teacher but also with one another. To accomplish this goal, teachers must offer activities that facilitate conversation and the use of real language. This also means that the traditional classroom seating arrangement may have to be adjusted so that students can sit in pairs or in small conversation groups, thus focusing on one another and the conversation, not on the teacher.

To move from a teacher-centered approach to a group-centered approach, teachers must help to create a class atmosphere in which the students feel free to express themselves, to make mis-

takes, and to try out new structures and new vocabulary. Kohn (1980), summarizing the implications of some recent sociolinguistic research findings, offers these ten practical suggestions to ESL teachers:

1. Try to set the students at ease. If they are relaxed about the idea of learning English, they will be willing to cooperate.

2. Provide a meaningful context for the introduction of new items and engage students' interest in this context.

3. Bring the focus of the class to the level of the students' experiences. Allow them to feel that their experiences are valid, important, and relevant to the learning of English (e.g., if you use dialogues, use situations that occur in the lives of the students).

4. Encourage the students to use English for social reasons (e.g., in conversations about personal interests or how to get a driver's license or find good food).

5. Bring native speakers into the classroom and let the students get acquainted with them socially.

6. Encourage students to take a personal interest in each other and to bring real-life situations into class for discussion.

7. If you use drills, be sure the class also has a chance to use English for real communication, with real questions and answers.

8. Let your own enthusiasm for learning draw the students into the game of wanting to learn. Whenever possible, organize class activities that you enjoy doing, and your pleasure will radiate to the students.

9. Encourage your students to take risks in English. Allow them to express whatever they have a need to say, even if they are not yet sure of the words.

10. Be adventuresome but authoritative in class. Give the students the feeling that they can depend on you to lead them to greater achievement in English.

Pre-Conversation Activities

Many students and teachers, especially those who are accustomed to an audiolingual drill approach in the ESL class, may have difficulty in adjusting to the use of conversation as a

classroom activity. The following preliminary activities, therefore, may provide transition for those who wish to move from a teacher-centered approach to a group-centered approach. It must be pointed out that these are *not* conversation exercises; they are warmup exercises to prepare students to engage in conversation.

Directed Listening

Before students can successfully participate in conversations, they must first be able to understand the language of conversational English. In addition, attentive listening is a very important aspect of conversation. Teachers, therefore, may find it necessary to do some preliminary work on listening comprehension by using samples of real language. (For a full discussion of teaching listening comprehension, see Quinn and Wheeler [1975].)

One approach is to introduce tapes of conversations. Another is to use model dialogues appropriate for various situations (renting an apartment, buying a car, declining an invitation, etc.). Although some teachers may wish to devise their own listening materials, there are a number of textbooks that focus on listening comprehension of real language. Several are mentioned below.

Because conversational English contains many reduced forms ("gonnah," "shoulda," "useta"), it is wise to give students practice in listening for and identifying these forms. Rost and Stratton (1978) present several types of exercises for that very purpose. In the first group of exercises, students are asked to listen to a tape and to distinguish between long forms (those that occur in carefully enunciated speech) and short forms (the reduced forms of casual, conversational speech). Here are a few of the contrasts, written in conventional spelling.

Long Form	Short Form
coffee and tea	coffee-n-tea
now or later	now-er-later
I used to live in Virginia.	I use-tah live in Virginia.
Is it serious?	Zit serious?
Does he live here?	(T) se live here?
Did you call in advance?	Juh call in advance?

After identifying the reduced forms in isolated phrases and sentences, students listen to them in conversation. There are 200 short situational dialogues covering such topics as transportation, telling time, making appointments, meeting and greeting, parting, gossiping. Students listen to dialogues and fill in the blanks with the forms they hear. In the following examples, notice the use of real language:

Parting:

Man-1: It's ten o'clock. (I'm going to have to) be leaving.
Man-2: Leaving? Already?
Man-1: Yes. (I've got to) get up early tomorrow.
Man-2: O.K. Stop over again sometime.

Man: I really hate to rush off like this.
Woman: No problem. We know (you're) busy.
Man: (I want to) get together again sometime soon.

Fast Food:

Woman: Next. May I help you?
Man: Yeh. (I want a) superburger, fries, (and a) large coke.
Woman: Super, fries, large coke. (That'll be a) dollar twenty-seven.

Wrong Numbers and Unwanted Calls:

Man: Hello.
Woman: Hello. May I speak to Jim?
Man: I'm afraid (you have the) wrong number.
Woman: (Isn't this) 278-2001?
Man: No, (this is) 278-2010.

Man: Hello.
Woman: Hello. (Is this the) Jackson residence?
Man: Yes, it is.
Woman: We understand that (you've) recently purchased a home.
Man: That's correct.
Woman: Well, Mr. Jackson, I represent the Acme Water Purification System Company, and as you know...
Man: I'm sorry. I'm not interested.

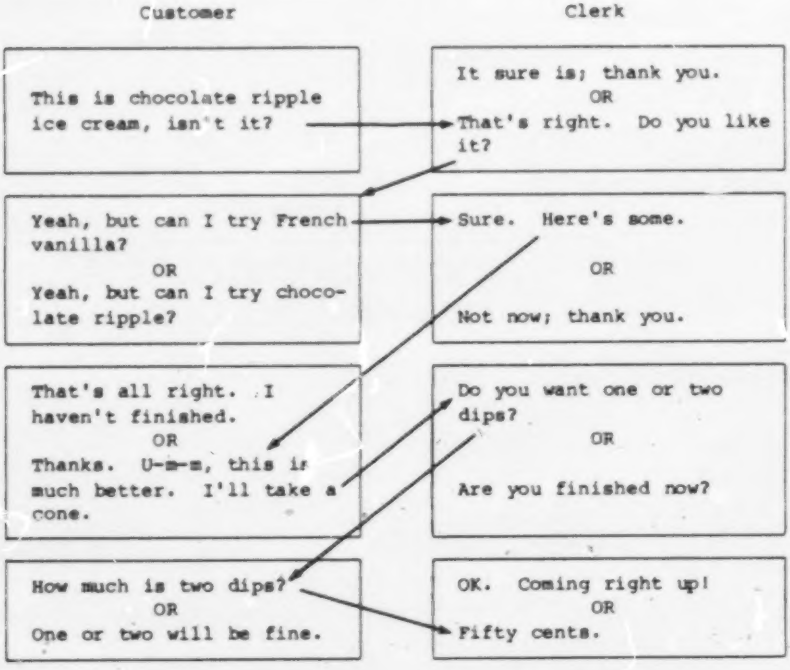
Similar listening comprehension exercises are offered by James, Whitley and Bode (1980). These tapes, however, include unrehearsed monologues and dialogues that contain hesitations, interruptions, unfinished sentences, false starts, and laughter. In the following excerpt, students are asked to listen to the tape and fill in the blanks.

Gary: What do you all do when you're angry? Is there any special (thing) that you do?
Bette: I (take) and throw dishes on (the) floor. And you know (what's) really awful is when (the) dishes don't break! (laughter)
Gary: You actually...you actually throw dishes on the floor?

Sharon: You really throw dishes on the floor?
Bette: Yes, I (get) out these coffee (mugs) I've got and I (just) throw it as hard (as) I can.
Gary: Really I've (never) known anybody to do (that)...you see it in the mo--...
Sharon: What do you do, Gary?
Gary: Well, I usually don't (talk).
Sharon: Really?
Gary: Yeah, I become (very) gloomy.

Find the Conversation

Another pre-conversation activity asks students to identify responses that logically follow what has just been said. One type is similar to the sort that is often used in roleplay exercises; only one of two responses is appropriate. Students are not, however, asked to assume the identity of the speakers; they are asked to "find the conversation" by identifying appropriate responses. The following example, similar to ones presented by Castro and Kimbrough (1980a), involves a customer who is sampling flavors in an ice cream shop.



The second type of exercise is a variation of the first. Given a series of answers, students may have to find the response, figure out what the question was, or both:

1. A: This isn't where Susan lives, is it?
   B: _____.
   a) Well, I don't have to. b) Well, I'm not sure. c) Well, I'm not here.

2. A: That's really a good price for a shirt, isn't it?
   B: _____.
   a) Yeah, it is. b) Yeah, who knows? c) Yeah, the shirt is.

3. A: Would you like something else to drink?
   B: _____.
   a) Sure. I'll have a sandwich. b) Sure. I'll take another Coke. c) Sure. I'll take something.

- - - -

1. A: _____.
   a) This is Mary Lawrence. b) How have you been? c) Hello.
   B: Fine, thanks.

2. A: _____.
   a) Where do you live? b) Who do you live with? c) Do you live alone?
   B: Yes, I do.

3. A: _____.
   a) Can I leave now? b) Can I get you anything? c) Can you wait a minute?
   B: Do you have any pistachios?

- - - -

Alan: I saw you last night.
Sue: _____.
a) Where was he?
b) Where was I?
c) Where did you say?

Alan: _____ _____.
a) Going into the movie.
b) Going away.
c) Going out.

Sue: _____.
a) Oh yes, I went to see the new Bergman film.
b) Oh yes, I was going away.
c) Oh yes.

Alan: _____.
a) How do you do?
b) How was it?
c) How do you know?

Sue: _____.
a) It was there, too.
b) It was too big.
c) It was quite good.

Dyads

Arranging students in pairs is one step toward preparing them to become involved in the act of conversation. Dyads are exercises for pairs of students in which one partner (sometimes both partners) has information unknown to the other. To complete a given task successfully, partners must listen closely to each other as well as give accurate information intelligibly.

Alice Pack's (1977) Dyad Learning Program: Prepositions (v.1), Pronouns and Determiners (v.2), Verb Forms and Verb Choices (v.3), for example, is similar to programmed instruction except that it requires students to work in pairs. One student reads a series of grammar cues, while the other student (the tutor) has the answers and must indicate whether his or her partner's choices are correct or incorrect. After completing a section, the tutor and the partner exchange roles. In Verb Forms and Verb Choices, for instance, one section deals with choices between make and do:

Student	Tutor
Bill always _____ the dishes.	does
She _____ a lot of mistakes on the exam.	made
Please _____ certain you haven't forgotten anything.	make
Bill always _____ his best.	does

Although Pack's dyad books are most appropriate for intermediate and advanced students, it is possible for ESL teachers to create their own dyads for students at lower levels of English proficiency. Olsen, in Using Dyads for Maximum Communication Practice, provides examples of two different types of dyad activities for low-level ESL students (see following page).

Olsen finds that role switching is often confusing to the students and suggests giving them a block of at least four to six practice sentences before they begin.

Pictures

Using pictures in the ESL class is another way of encouraging students to talk (Boyd and Boyd 1979). Pictures can be used for a variety of purposes (for example, to teach or review grammatical structures, pronunciation, vocabulary) and with different levels (beginning, intermediate, and advanced). To provide a lesson on verb tenses, for example, a teacher might choose a picture of a boy standing beside a broken vase while being confronted by his mother. The teacher who has a low-level class may stress only one feature of the picture (for instance, one action using the present continuous tense). With more advanced students, however, the teacher may use the same picture to elicit more complex interchanges that incorporate several contrasting tenses.

SAMPLE GRAMMAR DYADS
Type I: Fill in the blanks--oral work

A Using is, are, a, an

LISTEN 1. What's this? It's a carrot.

SAY 2. What_____that? It's_____orange.

LISTEN 3. What are those? They're tomatoes.

SAY 4. What_____these? They're melons.

SAMPLE GRAMMAR DYADS
Type I: Fill in the blanks--oral work

B Using is, are, a, an

SAY 1. What_____this? It's_____carrot.

LISTEN 2. What's this? It's_____orange.

SAY 3. What_____these? They're tomatoes.

LISTEN 4. What are those? They're melons.

Type II: Cue Words--oral work

A Contrasting every day and now

LISTEN 1. Sam studies every day.

SAY 2. Anne/work/now

LISTEN 3. They're sleeping now.

SAY 4. We/study/every afternoon

Type II: Cue Words

B Contrasting every day and now

SAY 1. Sam/study/every day

LISTEN 2. Anne is working now.

SAY 3. They/sleep/now

LISTEN 4. We study every afternoon.

Students usually find the use of pictures to be fun and interesting. For low-level students, pictures provide a focal point that is tangible, nonverbal, and not as threatening as the printed word might be.

For all students, moreover, picture activities can lead to conversation. Because the students are looking up at the pictures and at one another (not down at a book), they are set to embark on lively interaction. The teacher's silence at this point can lead to even more student talk.

Dialogue Writing

Another use of pictures as a preliminary conversation activity is to ask students to create imaginary dialogues for pictures containing two or more characters (Olsen 1979). Students are divided into pairs and given 10 to 15 minutes to collaborate and write the dialogues. The teacher may then wish to put them on a handout, along with the pictures, for class correction and discussion.

Preliminary Games

To prepare students to become involved in classroom conversation, the ESL teacher should encourage them to consider various sociolinguistic features of conversation. In one approach suggested for intermediate and advanced students, Palmer and Esarey (1975) use a game to teach the use of six speech acts: requests, demands, promises, defense of oneself, praise, and reprimands. One version of the game involves a roleplay between an employer and a secretary. The student who plays the employer (the teacher or a teacher's aide could assume the role, depending on the level of the class) is asked to assume the role of the boss of a small company. He is to find out if the secretary has mailed the letters she stayed late to type the night before. If the secretary mailed the letters, the boss should reprimand her for not showing him the letters first. If, however, the secretary did not mail them, the boss should praise her for keeping them.

The student who plays the secretary, on the other hand, is given four possible responses:

Variation #1--The secretary mails the letters and, when reprimanded, promises that in the future she will always let the boss see the letters before they are mailed.

Variation #2--The secretary does not mail the letters. When the boss praises her, she should request more time during the day to work on letters.

Variation #3--The secretary does not mail the letters. When the boss praises her, she should demand that she be given more time during the day to work on letters.

Variation #4--The secretary mails the letters. When the boss reprimands her, the secretary should defend herself on the grounds that the letters did not seem to be important.

As each variation is presented in class, the students who do not participate in the roleplay are not simply a passive audience; they are required to be "active listeners." They must mark on their worksheets whether the employer (1) praises the secretary or (2) reprimands the secretary, and they must determine whether the secretary responds by (1) making a request, (2) making a demand, (3) making a promise, or (4) defending herself.

Expected Responses

When Americans use certain conversational phrases, they wait for the person talking with them to make the expected response. If something very different is said, or nothing is said, most Americans are surprised or perhaps offended. When two friends are saying goodbye, for example, if one says, "Have a nice day," the expected response is a cliché: "You, too." When two people meet for the first time and one says, "Glad to meet you," the response is often a repetition, with primary stress on the final word: "Glad to meet you." ESL students in the United States have probably heard these expected responses many times, but they may not know how and when to use them.

One pre-conversation activity (Sharpe) that encourages ESL students to recall such responses is one in which they are required to fill in the clichés and expected responses on worksheets:

Situation: When a friend receives your gift.
Phrase: "Thank you. It's beautiful."
Cliché: (I'm glad you like it.)

Situation: When a friend is not able to help you.
Phrase: "I'm sorry."
Cliché: (That's okay. Thanks anyway.)

Situation: When two people arrive at the same place at the same time.
Phrase: "After you."
Expected Response: (After you.)

Situation: When two people are both at fault.
Phrase: "Pardon me."
Expected Response: (Pardon me.)

Oral Reports

Class reports are usually no more than monologues; however, Faird (1978) shows how oral reports can lead to classroom conversation by following a four-step process: (1) Let each student select an article from the daily newspaper for a report. (2) Students present reports orally without using notes, except perhaps to refer to proper names, dates, and figures. The teacher has a copy of the article and may coach the reporting student from time to time. The other students, meanwhile, listen carefully and jot down names, numbers, and brief facts to be used in questions later. (3) At the end of the report, the members of the class may ask the reporting student to clarify details or to restate elements of the news story they did not understand. (4) Several students put questions concerning the news story to any other members of the class. The reporting student decides whether or not each answer is correct.

If the questions are all of the who, what, when, where variety, the teacher may want to ask a few questions that require the answering student to give an opinion. About an international conference, for example, the teacher may ask, "Are conferences like this really useful?" Or about a murder, the teacher may want to know, "Is murder always wrong?" These kinds of questions (and their answers) contain some of the flavor of real-life conversation. After a few reports, the students soon learn to ask opinion questions themselves, thus gradually limiting the teacher's participation, while at the same time increasing the amount of meaningful conversation among themselves.

Conversation Strategies

Because the traditional textbook responses are invariably short and direct, ESL students who have memorized "classic" responses to certain English questions often have difficulty maintaining a conversation with native English speakers. Such students need instruction and practice in developing and sustaining everyday conversations. Holmes and Brown (1976) offer four practical suggestions, including class activities:

1. When you are asked a question, answer it and then ask a question yourself related to something in your answer.

   Example: A: Where are you going to study?
   B: In Chicago. Can you tell me what the climate is like there?

   By following the example, supply responses for B:

   A: What will you study?
   B:

   A: Where are you staying?
   B:

2. When you are asked a question, give some extra information, and then ask an appropriate question:

Example: A: Are you a student?
B: Yes. I've come to study engineering. Are you a student?

or

B: Yes. I've come to study engineering. Do all American universities teach engineering?

Supply the responses for B:

A: Have you found a satisfactory place to live?
B:

A: Which part of Indonesia do you come from?
B:

A: How do you like the climate here?
B:

3. If there is any part of a question or a reply that you do not understand, be brave enough to say so at once. It is better than pretending that you do understand. Unless you understand most of the questions and the replies, the conversation will die.

Suggest some ways of asking for a question or a reply to be repeated and explained.

4. If you are asked a question and you do understand it but you do not want to reply because you think it is too personal, you must think of a way of giving a very vague answer and then changing the topic.

Example: A: Are you feeling homesick?
B: I'm not sure. Many things are very different here. Have you ever lived in another country?

Suggest answers to the questions below:

A: Do you think all overseas students should return to their countries when they finish their courses?
B:

A: Are you active in politics at home?
B:

A: Do you like American food?
B:

Pre-conversation activities such as these can provide valuable transition not only to everyday conversations but also to successful classroom conversations and roleplays.

From Controlled to Free Conversation

The effective teaching of conversation skills requires the appropriate structuring of speaking activities. Just as there is a danger that these activities may be so controlled that they bear little resemblance to real conversation, there is also the possibility that they may be so unstructured that they merely provide occasions for students to exchange ungrammatical utterances. To avoid either of these two extremes, teachers must gauge the conversational material to the proficiency level of the learners and devise conversational activities that allow and encourage students to react orally. At the same time, however, these activities should provide sufficient control to keep the verbal exchange from wandering aimlessly or the learners from floundering in errors or seeking the security of silence.

Just as there is a continuum from guided writing to free written expression, there is also a continuum from guided conversation to free conversation. The writing continuum has been described adequately; a number of textbooks bear titles that indicate the degree of control provided for the writing activities presented. A similar method can be used to categorize conversation activities: controlled, semicontrolled, and free. The degree of control refers to the amount of structure that the teacher imposes on an activity and the number of choices that students are expected to make.

In controlled conversation activities, the directions are very explicit, and the material to be used is presented in the form of a script (either in a textbook or on a handout), thus leaving few choices for the students to make. Unlike traditional audiolingual dialogues, however, the activity is not completely controlled because the students always have alternative responses to choose from. It is these choices that determine what is communicated.

With semicontrolled conversation activities, the directions are less explicit, and the material is presented in such a way that students have a number of choices to make as to vocabulary, structure, content, and manner of presentation. These choices determine exactly what ideas, information, or feelings are exchanged and how they are communicated.

In free conversation, the teacher exerts the least amount of control, gives few--if any--instructions, and encourages the students to express their own ideas or opinions about a topic. Even the free conversation, however, has some restrictions. The teacher is always free to interject ideas, adjust the direction of the conversation, or terminate it completely.

The Role of the Teacher and the Students in the Conversation Class

The success of classroom conversations depends, to a large extent, on clearly established roles for the teacher and the students. If both the teacher and the students are unsure of their roles, they may be uncomfortable because they do not realize what is expected of them. Black (1970) indicates that in such a case either one of two possible situations may occur: (1) the teacher waits patiently for the students to speak, while the room is filled with a very noticeable and seemingly interminable silence; or (2) the teacher simply keeps talking until the students have something to say. In neither case is conversation taking place.

The Teacher's Role

Conversation in a second language is a skill, and like all other skills, it requires instruction and practice. It is the teacher's responsibility to provide both the instruction and the occasions for practice in the ESL class. To provide the instruction, the teacher must choose the type of conversation activity that is most appropriate for his or her students, explain the mechanics of the activity, ensure that each student participates, and answer any questions that arise. To provide occasions for conversation practice, the teacher must decide whether the conversation lesson will be a separate activity or whether it will be integrated with other lessons--grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation.

No matter which conversation activity is chosen, or for what purpose, the teacher should realize that it takes time for students to develop conversation skills. At first the students may be reluctant to participate in various activities that require them to sort through the bits and pieces of language they have learned and to produce original and coherent statements, questions, and responses. When the teacher first tries to introduce some activity to encourage conversation, and it works less successfully than he or she had hoped, there may be a tendency to abandon the entire concept of using "real" language in the classroom. In such a situation, the teacher must be patient, allowing time for students to become accustomed to their role as active participants and to develop confidence in conversing with the teacher and with their classmates.

Likewise, the teacher may be reluctant to switch roles: changing from dominant figure in the classroom to conversation facilitator. If students are to develop conversation skills, however, they must be given time and opportunities to speak, and the teacher must speak very little. Although total silence may not be desirable or even feasible for all ESL teachers, they should learn to set up situations that inspire conversation and

then step back, allowing the activity and the learning to take precedence over their presence.

This does not mean, however, that the teacher has become obsolete. On the contrary, it means that the teacher has a very important role in planning, developing, structuring, and guiding conversation activities. He or she, therefore, must not use the conversation period as a chance to grade papers or to leave the classroom. Such disregard for the conversation activity would merely indicate to the students that conversation is of little significance. The teaching of conversation skills is important; therefore, it should be regarded as such, by teachers and students alike.

The Students' Role

As the teacher relinquishes the traditional role of dominant figure in the classroom, more emphasis is placed on the students as active participants and learners. Much is required of them. By engaging in conversation activities, they must move from the passive role of note-taker and listener to the active role of speaker-listener-respondent. Instead of answering with predetermined responses as in a pattern drill, the students are expected to use English in a realistic manner in much the same way that they would in a social encounter outside the classroom. That is, students must speak so that they are understood, and if they are not understood, they must be able to use strategies for repeating or rephrasing messages; they must listen carefully and know how and when to interrupt a speaker if they cannot comprehend messages; they must know how to keep a conversation going and when and how to terminate it; and they must know--or certainly learn--various nonverbal or paralinguistic methods for sending and receiving messages. In short, they must know or learn how to communicate in English.

This is no small task, and students who are accustomed to the traditional passive role may experience considerable difficulty in switching to the active role of participant or interlocutor. Not given the opportunity to rely on a textbook with all the responses printed boldly on the page, students are forced to think in English and to recall the words and grammatical structures they have mastered. In addition, the conversational situations should encourage them to search for new words and structures, in which case some of them may become impatient and even frustrated. It is at this point that the teacher, as conversation facilitator, should assist the students in communicating what they want to say.

With continued participation in classroom conversation, however, most students soon begin to accept their role as active participants, shed their inhibitions, and frequently request that more class time be allowed for conversation. They develop a strong sense of pride and accomplishment in knowing that they are now able to use "real" English in the classroom, not "textbook" English.

Conversation Activities

Roleplay

Roleplay is a type of skit in which learners assume the identity of individual characters in a given situation and engage in a conversation that reflects the personalities, needs, and desires of the characters they are asked to portray. Although roleplay may involve some acting, the emphasis is on the verbal interchange rather than on the actions. Simple props may be used, but they are not essential. Roleplay differs from the traditional classroom dialogue in that it encourages participants to develop genuine conversational skills by requiring them to listen carefully and by allowing them to choose one among several possible responses rather than by dictating a specific response.

Students cannot engage successfully in roleplay until they understand what is expected of them. Because some students may be reluctant at first to perform in English in front of their teacher and their classmates, one approach is to group the students according to nationality and let them role-play a situation in their native language. Then the same students enact the situation in English. After the second roleplay, the entire class is asked to comment on the differences between the two performances. Savignon (1972) suggests that by enacting such situations as greeting a friend after a vacation, inviting a fellow student to a movie, or expressing annoyance over some lost notes, students will have an opportunity to point out interesting sociolinguistic and nonverbal features in the two performances: how close the interlocutors stand, how much they touch, what terms of endearment or respect they use, what attitudes they convey toward time, and so forth.

In setting up a roleplay, the teacher should explain the given situation or provide the students with a written description of it. For low-level ESL students, the teacher may have to go over some of the possible utterances that would grow out of the situation and repeat them, emphasizing the pronunciation and intonation. Also, in order to give the students confidence, the teacher may wish to demonstrate role playing with a student or a teaching assistant first. The other steps depend on what type of roleplay is chosen: controlled conversation, semicontrolled conversation, or free conversation.

Controlled Conversation Roleplay

In this type of roleplay, grammatical structures and the vocabulary are controlled by a script. The teacher presents a situation, assigns the roles, and gives the participants the script. The learner's choices are limited to two possible utterances, both of which are included in the script. The

learner must choose the one that is appropriate to the given situation. For example:

Characters: A customer and a used car salesman
Situation: The customer goes to a used car lot to buy a car.

Salesman	Customer
A. Good morning! Can I fix you up with a car today?	B. Take your time. I just want to look around.
A. Hi, there! I'll be with you in a minute.	B. Maybe. I'm looking for a used car that gets good gas mileage.
A. Sorry to keep you waiting. What can I do for you?	B. I'm looking for a used car in good condition, one that's not very old.
A. I've got just the thing for you--right over here. Take a look at this '78 Chevy Impala.	B. It's a pretty big car. What kind of gas mileage does it get?
A. Oh, it gets pretty fair mileage, but notice how clean it is inside.	B. That car's over six years years old. I'm looking for a newer model.
A. Right over here is what you need--a '75 Volkswagen.	B. Sure, it looks nice, but what about the gas mileage?
A. But this car will go anywhere. Get in and take a look at it.	B. But look! Here's a tear in the seat.
A. The gas mileage depends on how much you drive. But check out that AM-FM radio.	B. I'm sure the radio is fine.
A. Don't worry. We can fix that. I can let you have this car for $5,000.	B. No, I'm late for an appointment.
A. Do you want to take it out on the road for a drive?	B. This is not what I had in mind. Besides, $5,000 is too much. I have to go.

A. But wait a minute. I can let you have it for $4,000.	B. Even $4,000 is too much for that Volkswagen.
A. What about this '78 Cadillac. I can give you a great deal on it.	B. I'm not really interested. I have to go.
A. The Cadillac even has a tape deck.	B. No, thank you.
A. What about $3,500?	B. Good-bye.

The students can continue practicing the roleplay until they can present both versions without the script. They are encouraged to make appropriate variations in or additions to the script. A closer approximation of real conversation will be achieved if the "customer" is given only the A section and the "salesman" is given only the B section. In that way, the learners must listen more carefully for their "cues."

A more complex variation of the controlled conversation roleplay is one containing imperatives. This version requires the students to change indirect speech to direct speech.

Salesman	Customer
A. Greet the customer. Then ask him if you can fix him up with a car.	B. Tell the salesman to take his time. Tell him you just want to look around.
A. Greet the customer. Tell him you will be with him in a minute.	B. Tell him maybe, and that you are looking for a used car that gets good gas mileage.
A. Apologize for keeping the customer waiting. Then ask him what you can do for him.	B. Tell the salesman you are looking for a used car in good condition, one that's not very old.
A. Tell the customer you have just the thing for him--right over here. Ask him to take a look at this '78 Chevy Impala.	B. Remark that it's a pretty big car. Ask what kind of gas mileage it gets.

A. Reply that it gets pretty good mileage, but ask the customer to notice how clean it is inside.

B. Reply that the car is over six years old. Tell him that you are looking for a newer model.

A. Tell the customer that right over here is what he needs--a '75 Volkswagen.

B. Agree with the salesman that it looks nice, but ask him again about the gas mileage.

A. Tell the customer that this car will go anywhere. Invite him to get in and take a look at it.

B. Become upset because you find a tear in the seat.

A. Remind the customer that the gas mileage depends on how much you drive. Ask him to check out that AM-FM radio.

B. Tell the salesman that you are sure the radio is fine.

A. Tell him not to worry. You can fix the tear. Tell the customer that you can let him have this car for $5,000.

B. Tell him "no," that you are late for an appointment.

A. Ask the customer if he wants to take it out on the road for a drive.

B. Tell him that this is not what you had in mind. Besides, you feel that $5,000 is too much. You have to go.

A. Ask him to wait a minute. You can let him have this car for $4,000.

B. Tell him that even $4,000 is too much for that Volkswagen.

A. Ask him to look at this '78 Cadillac. You can give him a great deal on it.

B. Tell him that you are not really interested. You have to go.

A. Point out that the Cadillac even has a tape deck.

B. Refuse the offer and thank the salesman.

A. Offer to sell the Volkswagen for $3,500.

B. Say "good-bye" to the salesman and walk away.

Semicontrolled Conversation Roleplay

In this type of roleplay, grammatical structures and/or the vocabulary may be suggested by the teacher, but much of the content is determined by the participants. In the following list of utterances suggested by Olsen (1977), the grammatical structures are controlled by items on a list, whereas much of the content is chosen by the students who play the roles.

Characters: A customer and a salesclerk
Situation: Shopping in a department store

--Excuse me, where's the/where are your _____?
--Right here/ Right over there/ Down the aisle/ In the back of the store.
--Pardon me, where can I find_____?
--Next to the elevator/ Across from the escalator/ By the stairs.
--I'm looking for a _____. Do you know where I can find one?
--Try the second/third floor/ On the _____ floor/ In the basement.
--I'd like to see a/some _____. Do you have any?
--Yes, we have several styles. What size do you wear?
--I don't know. Our sizes are different in _____ (country). But my hips/bust/waist is _____ inches.
--This is too big/small/short/long. I need something smaller/larger, etc.
--I'm sorry, but this is too expensive for me. Do you have anything cheaper?
--How much is it? I'll take it.
--I'm sorry, but this is defective/ has a rip/tear/hole/flaw. There's a button missing/ The zipper is broken.
--I'd like to return/exchange it. Here's my receipt.
--Do you mail overseas?

Since these sample utterances are only a few of many possible utterances, the two students who are assigned this roleplay should be allowed some preparation time before they present it.

As a variation of semicontrolled roleplay, the teacher may provide the vocabulary and the content, and the participants provide--or at least manipulate--the grammatical structures. The following example, similar to those developed by Brown and Sandberg (1969), takes the format of a telephone conversation:

Student #1: You are working in the box office of the Twin Cinemas Theater. You have the following information available:

Times for movies: 3:00, 5:00, 7:00, 9:00 p.m.
Ticket prices: $3.50 for adults, $2.00 for children (under 12)
Showing at Cinema I: Space Race, rated G (General Audience)

Showing at Cinema II: Love Me Forever, rated R (No one under 17 admitted without parents)

Refreshments (soft drinks, popcorn, candy) available in the lobby

Now answer the phone. Since you are talking on the telephone, turn your back so that you cannot see the caller.

Student #2: You call the Twin Cinemas Theater and ask

1. if there is a show before noon;
2. what movies are showing;
3. the ratings for both movies;
4. what "rated G" means;
5. if you can take you six-year-old child to Cinema II;
6. how much the tickets will cost for you and your child;
7. if they serve sandwiches in the lobby;
8. when the movie will be over.

If the teacher finds that some students are not ready to participate in the semicontrolled version, whereas others are ready and capable, he or she might ask the latter to assume the role of Student #1 (semicontrolled) and ask the former to read a list of specific questions (controlled):

1. Can you please tell me if there is a movie at 6:00 p.m.?
2. Did you say five o'clock?
3. What is showing at Cinema II?
4. Can I take my child?
5. How much is a child's ticket?
6. What would be the price for one adult and one child?
7. If the movie starts at 5:00, when will it be over?

Free Conversation Roleplay

This type of roleplay presents no prescribed grammatical structures and very few suggestions for the vocabulary to be used. The participants are free to make decisions concerning the grammar, vocabulary, and most of the content and scope of the roleplay. One example is the following:

Characters: A customer and a salesclerk
Situation: The customer goes to a department store to buy some clothes, and the salesclerk tries to sell the customer some defective merchandise.

The teacher assigns the roleplay to two students and then gives them 20 to 30 minutes to develop and practice their presentation before they deliver it before the class. During the planning period, the teacher is available to answer any questions concerning vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc.

Rost and Stratton (1978) combine problem solving with a functional approach and use a telephone conversation format to create various free conversation roleplays. In the following six examples, the problem is dealing with different types of unwanted telephone calls. Students must perform various functions (inform, request, suggest, refuse, fabricate and apologize) in order to solve each problem:

1. Tell the caller he has the wrong number.
2. Ask the caller what number he's dialing.
3. Tell the caller he'd better check the listing again.
4. A telephone salesman calls you. Tell him you're not interested in his product.
5. You have just received the third call in one week from a company which sells vacuum cleaners. You're tired of this situation. Tell the salesman you'd love to buy his product. Give the salesman the wrong address.
6. You wanted to call a friend and you have dialed the wrong number. Apologize.

Free conversation roleplay and semicontrolled conversation roleplay need not be limited to only two participants. On the contrary, Olsen and Gosak (1978) mention that as many as 12 students may take part. The following free conversation roleplays involving more than two characters have been suggested by Deyoe (1979):

Characters: Teachers, parent(s), child
Situation: The child has failed the year because....
(The group invents a reason.)

Characters: Girl, boy, girl's parent(s)
Situation: The boy and girl leave for a movie at 6:00 p.m. and return at 4:00 a.m.

Characters: Husband, wife, mother-in-law or father-in-law, traffic cop
Situation: One of the three is driving and receives a speeding ticket. All are in the same car when it happens.

Telephone dialogues and roleplays can be set up in class in order to produce both semicontrolled and free conversations while involving as many as six participants. The following roleplay is similar to those used by Ferguson and O'Reilly (1977):

Situation:
Mr. Johnson has to go to Atlanta tomorrow for a two-day business trip. He is not certain when his plane will arrive in Atlanta. He also wants to know if he has a reserved room

in an Atlanta hotel. He asks his secretary to call the travel agency to check the plane schedule and call the hotel to check about the room. Also he asks his secretary to make dinner reservations for two people at 8:00 tomorrow night at Hugo's Restaurant.

Phone Conversations:

1. The secretary and the travel agent
2. The secretary and the switchboard operator at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Atlanta
3. The secretary and the reservations clerk at the Hyatt Regency
4. The secretary and the maitre d' at Hugo's

Because of the vocabulary cues in the "Situation," the conversations for the secretary and Mr. Johnson are semicontrolled, whereas for the others the conversation is uncontrolled.

Additional ideas for roleplays. Practically any situation can be transformed into a classroom roleplay. The possibilities are almost limitless. One activity that has many variations is the socio-drama, a type of roleplay that presents students with a story containing a dilemma (Scarcella 1978). The class discusses the problem, after which the teacher selects participants to enact the drama and assigns them their roles. After the roleplay, the class explores alternative ways of solving the problem. New roleplayers are chosen, who then present a reenactment and try to solve the dilemma by using new strategies. Here are three possible dilemmas to use: (1) the student who comes to class on Monday unprepared to take a test because he or she thought the test would be given on Tuesday; (2) the young husband who receives a sweater, two sizes too large, knitted by his mother-in-law; or (3) the police detective who discovers that the "hit-and-run" driver he has been trying to find is his own teenage son (or daughter).

The underlying theory of roleplaying is that the classroom is an artificial environment; therefore, the teacher, in preparing the students to communicate in the "real world," should introduce situations that approximate human interactions that occur outside the classroom. Black and Butzkamm (1978), however, maintain that the situational teaching device of pretending that the classroom is something other than it is--a department store, a bank, a business office, and so on--may often heighten rather than remove artificiality. The situational viewpoint, they contend, disregards the dynamic communication process that takes place constantly in the classroom, namely, the interaction between teacher and student and that among the students themselves.

Black and Butzkamm, therefore, advocate the use of dialogues and roleplays that originate in classroom situations. To that end, they have identified two dimensions of classroom language: notional and situational.

Notional Categories		Situational Categories
1. Information enquiry explanation advice	4. Conflict refusal opposition threat mediation compliance	A. Classroom organization B. Learning problems C. Homework D. Tests E. Failure F. Stress G. Extra-classroom activity H. Personal problems I. Social problems
2. Values approval disapproval applause	5. Expression of feelings	
3. Debate agreement disagreement criticism persuasion protest		

By combining the notions and the situations, a creative teacher can have an incredible number of ideas for roleplays, all dealing with classroom situations and classroom language: the nervous student who gets sick every time there is an exam, the football player who has not prepared his homework because of the game last night, the student who wants to ask a question but doesn't know how to ask it in English, the student who tries to persuade the teacher to change a grade, and so on.

Question-and-Answer Activities

In addition to roleplays, there are other activities that provide students the opportunity to build fluency by learning and practicing real language. In contrast to roleplay exercises in which students assume the identity of other persons (or play themselves but imagine that they are in a situation outside the classroom), question-and-answer activities call for the students to play themselves in the context of normal classroom interaction. By asking one another questions, they truly engage in the conversation act by communicating ideas, information, feelings, or opinions of their own. In some instances, students answer questions about themselves ("How do you get to school?"); in others, they answer questions about general information ("Does this city/town have bus service?") or about people, places, or things in pictures ("Where is the sugar in this picture?"). Nevertheless, in each case they are given the opportunity to hear and use real language.

There are several ways to arrange the classroom for this kind of activity. Students may ask and answer questions or interview one another on a one-to-one basis by working in pairs.

A second way is to allow students to circulate around the room in order to ask the same question of several of their classmates. For beginning students, the teacher may want to set up a "circle dialogue" with students sitting in one large circle. Such an arrangement allows the teacher to "teach" the question by first asking each student the question, and then by instructing students to ask and answer the questions in turn around the circle. A further possibility is to allow a student to call on another in the class to answer questions. The student who answers may then call on still another student to answer the questions.

The question-and-answer format is appropriate for all levels of proficiency--beginning, intermediate, and advanced. The degree of difficulty depends to some extent on the amount of control imposed on the activity and the number of choices students are asked to make.

Controlled Question-and-Answer Activities

For controlled question-and-answer activities, students have a script to follow and few decisions to make. In contrast to roleplay, however, students must always insert facts or ideas that are their own and that make each conversational exchange unique.

This type of activity is an important teaching device because it provides a way to give students examples of what to say in certain situations or how to use language to perform various functions. The series In Touch (Castro and Kimbrough 1979), for example, presents language in "meaningful chunks" and identifies the function to be performed. Lessons begin with a complete dialogue, which is then broken down into pairs of questions and answers for practice throughout the lesson. Toward the end of the lesson, there may be an "open conversation" that allows students to reconstruct a full dialogue; this time, however, they use their own facts and opinions. Students are reminded of the functions they are now able to perform (e.g., giving information about oneself, offering advice, refusing or accepting advice) with the language they have learned in the lesson. In the following example, beginning students are instructed to ask someone how to spell his or her name. A model dialogue serves as a guide:

Manja: What's your last name?
José: Galvis.
Manja: How do you spell it?
José: G-A-L-V-I-S

Student #1: What's your last name?
Student #2: _____
Student #1: How do you spell it?
Student #2: _____

As students take turns asking and answering the questions, they learn to perform the language function of asking a person's last name and giving information about themselves.

Another exercise can be used to teach students how to invite someone to do something and how to accept or refuse an invitation:

Sam: Would you like to go to a party tonight?
Sue: Sure, I'd love to.

#1: Would you like to _____?
#2: Sure, I'd love to. OR I'm sorry, I can't. OR I'm sorry, I don't know how. OR Tell me more about it.

Sandberg and Steinmetz (1980) first use a programmed instruction approach to provide students with vocabulary and structures needed for communication. After students have completed the programmed lessons, the teacher sets up a situation in class that calls for the use of the language they have studied. To introduce numbers, for example, there are questions regarding time: "If it is 5:00 p.m. now, what time will it be in three hours?" and "It is 9:00 p.m. now. Therefore it was _____ five hours ago."

In some of the exercises, students are provided with the questions to ask one another. For the questions below, there is only one correct answer:

1. What time is it, please?
   It's _____.
2. What day is it today?
   Today is _____.
3. What is the date today?
   Today is _____.
4. What will the date be tomorrow?
   Tomorrow it _____.

Factual questions such as these can be used with beginning students. For intermediate and advanced students, however, questions containing more complex structures or more abstract questions should be used.

Several textbooks for beginning students use illustrations, pictures, or sketches to provide the stimulus for question-and-answer activities. Sandberg and Steinmetz, for example, use drawings to illustrate actions and objects. In one instance there are pictures of children, cars, alarm clocks, snakes, tigers, dogs, horses, cold weather, and hot weather. Students are to ask and answer this question: "Which do you like and which don't you like?" In another exercise, there are pictures of clothes, soap, a car, a motorcycle, a swimming pool, and a table. The question is "Which do you want and which do you need?"

They also show how the question-and-answer activity, along with pictures, can be used to introduce or review vocabulary (need/want/like) or to provide aural/oral practice in distinguishing minimal pairs (washing/watching). Given a series of drawings (people washing dishes, watching TV, listening to the radio, cooking meals, singing in the bathtub), students can ask one another, "Which do you want to do? Which do you like to do? Which do you need to do?"

Carver and Fotinos (1977a) use a circle dialogue (students sitting in a circle asking and answering questions) to introduce and practice useful vocabulary. In these examples, the questions are not necessarily ones that students might use outside the classroom, but they are meaningful because students are exchanging factual information about themselves:

1. Do you eat at home? Yes, I do. No, I don't.
2. Do you watch TV at home?
3. Do you listen to the radio at home?
4. Do you dance at home?
5. Do you read at home?
6. Do you write letters at home?

Afterwards, pictures of a furnished house, with each household item labeled, provide the stimuli for information questions (rather than yes/no questions):

1. What room do you sleep in? I sleep in the _____.
2. What room do you take a bath or shower in?
3. Where do you eat?
4. Where do you study?
5. Where do you sit and talk?
6. Where do you watch TV?

Semicontrolled Question-and-Answer Activities

Teachers may exercise less control by giving students a chance to arrive at their own responses to questions. For low-level students, this may be done by using the conversational matrix, an exercise designed by Ralph Radell and used in Books 1 and 2 of A Conversation Book: English in Everyday Life (Carver and Fotinos 1977a and 1977b):

> Write your name on Line 1. Write two other students' names on Line 2 and Line 3. Answer the questions for yourself in the left row of the boxes (use I). Answer the questions for the other two students in the middle and right row of boxes (use He or She).

	1 _____	2 _____	3 _____
(a) What is your favorite holiday?			
(b) What is your favorite season?			
(c) What is your favorite kind of weather?			

The chart can be adapted to fit any sentence pattern or topic. It can also be enlarged to include more students or more questions, such as

1. What do you like to do in the spring?
   What do you like to do in the fall?
   What do you like to do in the winter?
   What do you like to do in the summer?

2. What do you do every day?
   What do you occasionally do?
   What do you never do?

3. What do you usually eat for breakfast?
   What did you eat for lunch yesterday?
   What are you going to eat for supper tomorrow?

4. What would you do if: (you had been) (you knew) (you saw)

5. What would you have done if: (you had been) (you had had) (you had known) (you had seen)

6. What can you do?
   What might you do?
   What should you do?
   What must you do?

7. What have you done? (just) (recently) (so far) (already) (not yet)

Obviously the conversation matrix can be used in a number of ways to stimulate students to engage in conversation in the classroom.

Another semicontrolled question-and-answer activity is suggested by James, Whitley and Bode (1980). Students are asked to work in pairs and to take turns asking and answering questions designed to elicit opinions. Students may choose one of the

responses given for each question or they may make up an original answer. This type of activity leads the students from a semicontrolled conversation to free expression by encouraging them to seek original responses:

Being Angry

Student A: (Ask B if s/he gets angry often.)
_____?

B: 1. Yes. Especially when I'm tired/busy/sick.
2. Now and then I do.
3. _____.

Student A: (Ask B what s/he does when s/he's angry.)
_____?

B: 1. I don't talk.
2. I don't do anything special.
3. _____.

Student A: (Ask if that's a good way of coping with it.)
_____?

B: 1. At least it makes me feel better.
2. No. But I don't know what else to do.
3. _____.

Another type of semicontrolled conversation exercise is that used in In Touch (Castro and Kimbrough 1980a and 1980b). In lessons on how to read maps and give directions, these complex tasks are broken down into small conversational units. Model dialogues are followed by questions and answers with blanks for students to fill in with names and locations of places familiar to them. In these exercises, students practice language functions they will certainly use outside of class. At the same time, they use the language Americans really use in such situations:

Ask and tell where places are in this way:
Tom: Is there a drugstore near here?
Jim: Well, there are two. One's just around the corner on Elm Street, and one's down this street about three blocks.

A: Is there a/an _____ near here?
B: (Yes,) there are two. One's _____ on _____, and one's _____. OR No, not within walking distance. OR I'm not sure. I don't live in this neighborhood.

Show someone a map of your city or neighborhood.
Linda: Here's where I live.
There's a drugstore here on the corner of 5th Avenue and 29th Street.
There's a laundromat here.

A: Here's _____.
There's a/an _____ here (on _____).

Open Conversation
A: Excuse me, is there a/an _____ near here?
B: Yes/No, _____.
A: What about a/an _____?
B: Yes/No, _____.

Still another semicontrolled exercise involves a set of questions provided in a textbook or by the teacher. First, a topic is introduced with readings and drawings. Then student conversation is generated and directed by a list of questions on the chosen topic. Carver and Fotinos (1977a), for example, provide the following questions about movies:

1. What was the last movie you saw?
2. What movie do you want to see?
3. What kind of movies do you like?
4. What is your favorite movie?
5. Have you ever seen the same movie more than once?
6. Who is your favorite actor?
7. Your favorite actress?

While the students are involved in asking and answering the questions, the teacher can encourage them to go beyond the who and what stage by asking why questions and supplying appropriate information.

Free Conversation: Questions and Answers

In a free conversation activity, students make up their own questions and their own answers on a given topic. This type of activity is especially useful for investigating cross-cultural differences such as how students from various countries celebrate holidays. The stimulus for the questions and answers may come from a reading, a discussion, pictures of people celebrating a holiday, or a movie or TV show.

The question-answer format differs from that of a discussion, however, because students may work in small groups or in pairs to interview one another concerning customs in their native countries and their experiences in the U.S. During these sessions, students may seek an explanation or clarification of American customs. Because the ESL class is often the only

"safe" place where students feel free to ask personal questions concerning cultural differences, the teacher should encourage questions and be prepared to facilitate answers.

Counseling/Learning Activity. A technique used in the counseling/learning method (Curran 1976) may prove useful for conducting a free question-and-answer session, especially with beginning and low-intermediate students. Ask six to eight students to sit in a circle. Tell them that they are going to have a conversation on any topic they choose for about 10 or 15 minutes. Also tell them that you will help them form their questions and answers if they need help. When a student is ready to ask the first question, turn on a tape recorder and have the student record the question as he or she directs it to one of the other students in the circle. (This activity usually works best if the questions are short and specific; with beginning students this will invariably be the case.)

As soon as the question is recorded, turn off the tape recorder until the next student is ready to answer the question. The tape recorder is off while students formulate their questions and responses or ask the teacher for help with pronunciation, vocabulary, or syntax. Because the students are recorded only after they are certain of what to say and how to say it, the final product on the tape will sound like a fluent, spontaneous conversation. At the beginning and low-intermediate levels, the results may be quite dramatic. Since it is the students themselves who create the questions and answers, the interest in such an activity is usually high. Later, the recording can be used as a lesson on grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary.

The Interview. The interview is another free conversation activity. Olsen and Gosak (1978) suggest two ways of conducting interviews. In the first, students question a classmate who gets up in front of the class about his or her family, friends, opinions on a particular issue--anything they wish to ask. To ensure that students do not ask inappropriate or embarrassing questions, however, one ground rule must be established: don't ask any questions that you would not want to answer yourself. Another rule is that the interviewee may give any answer he or she wishes, true or false, but must make some answer appropriate to the question. An alternative would be to invite a visitor to the class to be interviewed.

A second way to conduct interviews is to pair the students off and let them interview each other about a particular topic. This activity could be used the first day in an intermediate or advanced class as an ice-breaker. Partners then introduce each other to the class, using the third person singular. The mutual interview can be used throughout the year; call upon such topics as hobbies, class readings, news items, and personal, local, or international problems. For more topics, the teacher may wish to reprint a letter or two from an "Advice to the Lovelorn" col-

umn and follow it with a mutual interview: "Do you agree with so-and-so about the problem? What would you tell him or her to do?"

Topics for question-and-answer activities should be chosen for their level of interest to the students. What starts out as a question-and-answer session between two students or between students and teacher may well end up as a class discussion.

Class Discussions

Discussions are similar to conversations in that both are dependent upon social interaction. In both cases, someone must speak, and at least one other person must listen and respond. While a conversation is usually limited to two or three participants, discussions usually involve three or more participants. Furthermore, conversations are generally social in context and purpose, while discussions are topic-oriented. The skills one uses in a conversation are similar to those one needs to use in order to participate successfully in a discussion, namely, linguistic as well as communicative skills. For that reason, the use of discussions in the ESL class can aid language learners in improving their conversational skills.

Good discussions seldom occur spontaneously. More often than not, they have to be planned and carefully guided. Folland and Robertson (1978) maintain that much of the success of a classroom discussion or conversation depends on the teacher, not on the students. For that reason, they suggest these steps for the teacher who wants to stimulate a successful class discussion: (1) Arrange the chairs to facilitate conversation (preferably in a circle or a semicircle). (2) Introduce a topic and an outline. Teachers of beginning or intermediate students may find that introducing the topic and a few leading questions before the class period (so that students have a chance to think about the topic) will result in more fruitful discussions. (3) Nominate the first student to introduce the problem or issue. (4) Guide the group in keeping the discussion going. (5) Ensure that all students participate.

Although the teacher does much to plan and initiate the discussion, the actual discussion is conducted by the students. The teacher serves as an adviser, a catalyst, or a guide by asking leading questions, suggesting a change of topic if necessary, prompting words and structures, or correcting mistakes; however, the teacher never becomes the discussion leader. To indicate that he or she is relinquishing the leadership of the activity, the teacher should take a seat with the students rather than stand in front of the group.

There are three basic types of discussions, depending on the number of constraints that the teacher considers necessary for the students: the controlled discussion, the semicontrolled discussion, and the free discussion.

Controlled Discussion

The teacher provides the topic, which is often taken from a class reading assignment. Teachers with low-level students, however, may find that a picture, an ad, or some piece of realia provides a more effective stimulus for discussion. In the controlled discussion, the teacher (or the textbook) also provides some of the vocabulary or conversational expressions as well as an outline or list of points to be discussed. The following example of a controlled discussion list is from Molinsky and Bliss (1980):

> Talk with other students about two cities: your home town and the city where you live now, or any two cities you know. Talk about
>
> 1. the streets: quiet, safe, clean, wide, busy...?
> 2. the buildings: high, modern, pretty...?
> 3. the weather: cold, warm, rainy, snowy...?
> 4. the people: friendly, nice, polite, honest, busy, happy, hospitable, talkative, healthy, wealthy, poor...?
> 5. the city in general: large, interesting, lively, exciting, expensive...?
>
> In your conversation you might want to use some of these expressions:
>
> 1. I agree.
> 2. I disagree.
> 3. I agree/disagree with (you, him, her, John...).
> 4. I think so.
> 5. I don't think so.
> 6. In my opinion....

Semicontrolled Discussion

The teacher provides the topic and an outline or list of points or questions to be discussed, while the students are free to choose their own conversational expressions and vocabulary. The use of an outline or list in the controlled and semicontrolled discussion should help the students to avoid long silences by giving them points to think about and react to. It also answers a frequent student complaint: "I can't think of anything to say."

One example of such a list is based on Alexander, Vincent and Chapman (1978). After a lecture or reading about the changing roles of men and women, the following questions could be used to generate a discussion:

1. Do you think men and women are equal? Why or why not?

2. Here is a list of jobs. Which can men do? Which can women do?

doctor	journalist
secretary	bank teller
nurse	engineer
bus driver	dressmaker
chef	pilot

3. Which jobs can both men and women do?

Notice that the questions are carefully chosen. They require students to analyze, evaluate, or make a judgment. Yes/no responses are discouraged by the very nature of the questions. On the other hand, Byrd and Clemente-Cabetas (1980) use a short dialogue to provide the topic and a list of questions to provide the stimulus for a semicontrolled discussion:

Father: You're not old enough to leave home.
Son: I am, too. I just turned 21.

Mother: But who will take care of you?
Son: I'll take care of myself. I can cook and clean!

Father: You're too immature.
Son: But, dad, I have a job. I can make it on my own.

1. a) If you were the son, why would you want to leave home at 21?
   b) If you were the parent, why would you not want your son to leave home at 21?
2. If it were a daughter leaving home, would there be any difference in parental attitudes? If so, how?
3. Discuss the difference between age and maturity.
4. The change from adolescence to adulthood is one of the most difficult ones in life. Discuss some of the conflicts between parents' and adolescents' wishes.
5. One of the parental roles is to guide the children toward success and happiness in life. How can parents best do this without becoming domineering or lenient?
6. Parents usually have a great influence on their children. Discuss how this influence affects an offspring's choice of religion, politics, friends, career, and a mate.

Another way to plan a semicontrolled conversation is to identify the antithetical aspects of a debatable issue. Alexander and Vincent (1975), for example, start with a question such as "Should women work outside the home?" and then list some of the pros and cons of the issue:

The PROS	The CONS
1. Working adds to the personal or family income.	1. It takes the woman away from her family.
2. It gives the woman personal fulfillment and dignity.	2. It changes the role of the woman in the home.
3. It allows her to maintain skills or to use educational advantages.	3. It limits the number of children she can have.

This procedure encourages the students to consider both sides of the issue and to try to think of additional pros and cons. Here, too, it is best to provide the students with the list well in advance of the discussion so that they have time to consider the issues before participating in the discussion.

A third approach to structuring a semicontrolled conversation is to make use of "values clarification," a process of evaluating one's personal beliefs, feelings, goals, and values (Simon 1972). One type of values clarification activity is the personal opinion survey, a type of personal opinion poll that can contain forced-choice items. The following example concerns marriage customs.

Put a checkmark in one of the spaces for each item. This activity asks for your personal opinion, so do it yourself. There are no right or wrong answers.

	Agree	Disagree	Not necessarily
1. Parents should decide whom their children marry.	____	____	____
2. If two people want to get married, it is not necessary for them to ask their parents about it.	____	____	____
3. The only type of wedding ceremony that should be recognized is one which is held in a temple, mosque, church, or other holy place.	____	____	____
4. The parents of the bride should pay for the wedding.	____	____	____
5. The parents of the groom should provide a place for the newly married couple to live.	____	____	____

6. I believe in "love at first sight." ____ ____ ____

7. Two people who want to get married should be "engaged" for at least one year before marrying. ____ ____ ____

8. Two people who want to get married should not kiss each other before their engagement. ____ ____ ____

9. A newly married couple should leave on a wedding trip together soon after the wedding. ____ ____ ____

10. Divorce is wrong. ____ ____ ____

The values clarification activity can be an effective pre-discussion device because it directs each student to examine his or her personal values concerning a certain issue or topic before the discussion begins. Without such a pre-discussion activity, participants often spend much of the valuable discussion time sorting out their ideas and opinions before they can articulate them, in which case they must often backtrack and amend what they have said previously. The values clarification activity enables them to approach the discussion with a relatively clear notion of their personal opinions on a given topic or issue so that they are prepared to enter the discussion and to compare their opinions with those of others.

Byrd and Clemente-Cabetas (1980) combine the values clarification approach with a problem-solving activity to generate discussion:

> Mr. Pedora is an executive in an international public relations firm, and he needs to hire a new secretary. The secretary must have the following qualifications:
>
> .good typing and shorthand skills
> .pleasant manner with people
> .knowledge of other languages helpful
>
> Which person do you think is the best qualified to be Mr. Pedora's secretary? (See following page.)

To provide some control and to stimulate discussion, the authors offer the following thought-provoking questions:

1. a) Which candidate do you think is the best qualified for the job?

	KATE LANG	PHIL COLE	VIOLA MENDEZ	GRACE ROBERTS
TYPING	60 wpm	80 wpm	90 wpm	50 wpm
SHORTHAND	120 wpm	120 wpm	80 wpm	80 wpm
OTHER SKILLS	operates: calculator electric typewriter dictating machine	operates: electric typewriter dictating machine	operates: calculator electric typewriter dictating machine	operates: calculator electric typewriter
LANGUAGES	English	English and French	English and Spanish	English, Spanish, and French
APPEARANCE	neatly and simply dressed	well-dressed; well-groomed	well-groomed; natural with no makeup	sexy; wears a lot of makeup
MANNER	mature and businesslike telephone manner; liberated and independent; desk always clean, keeps nothing on it	pleasant telephone voice; makes a lot of personal telephone calls; desk always spotless	helpful telephone manner but high voice; moody; cluttered desk	warm and helpful telephone manner; spends a lot of time talking to other workers; desk not very neat
COMMENTS	did not get along with coworkers	did not know many of his coworkers but always polite	had some difficulty with female coworkers	always caught the eye of the men in the office
AGE	24	29	41	32
MARITAL STATUS	single	single	divorced; one child	single

b) Which candidate would you hire if you were Mr. Fedora?

2. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Explain your reasons.

a) A secretary should be a woman.
b) A secretary should be sexy and attractive.
c) A secretary should be young and enthusiastic.
d) A secretary should be mature and experienced.
e) A secretary should be independent and make decisions on his or her own.
f) A secretary should always ask for his or her boss's permission before acting.
g) A secretary should be loyal to his or her boss.

3. Below is a list of duties that most secretaries know. Which duties do you think are professional and which are personal? Explain your reasons.

a) taking shorthand
b) making coffee
c) planning luncheons for the office
d) keeping the office neat
e) typing business letters
f) taking telephone messages
g) staying overtime when there is a lot of work
h) getting along with clients
i) maintaining accurate files
j) remembering the boss's birthday
k) making excuses for the boss on the telephone when he or she doesn't want to talk
l) making reservations for a business trip

Values clarification can also be introduced in less structured ways through "Dear Abby" situations or such decision-making tasks as "which person to throw off the sinking life raft," "which persons to include in the bomb shelter," and "which three items to take to a newly discovered, inhabitable planet." An important aspect of values clarification is that because it stimulates each person to consider his or her own system of values, it tends to generate discussions that involve all the students.

Free Discussion

A free discussion is an open exchange of ideas among students, with the topic (usually based on a lecture or a reading assignment) suggested by the students or by the teacher; occasionally the teacher may interject ideas as a participant, but

he or she does not assume the role of discussion leader or grammar coach. The teacher may, however, present a few leading questions, either in writing or orally, to direct the students' attention to the topic. James, Whitley and Bode (1980), for example, after presenting several exercises on the topic of nursery school and early childhood education, offer the following questions and simply ask students to discuss them:

1. Nursery Schools: How do you feel about nursery schools? What is the purpose of nursery schools? Do you think nursery schools should prepare children for school? Why?

2. Being a Father: People often forget about the father when they talk about taking care of children. Do you think the father should spend the same amount of time as the mother in raising children? Why?

3. Children's Rights: Do you think of children as people with ideas and feelings? How do people from different countries treat children?

4. Strict Teachers: Which do you like better, strict teachers and classes, or teachers who are not strict at all? Explain why.

Some ESL teachers believe that there is no place for free discussions or free conversations in class (Taylor and Wolfson 1978). Nevertheless, free discussions do occur in the classroom. They sometimes happen spontaneously, and usually at the beginning of the class period, triggered by a student's comment about a television program, movie, or concert the night before, an item in the morning newspaper, or an encounter on the way to class. Other students as well as the teacher are inevitably involved in the spontaneous discussion. The teacher should be alert at this point to take advantage of the situation by involving as many students as possible and by seeing that they stick to the topic.

The spontaneous discussion gives the students an opportunity to try out the conversational skills that they have already learned (or are in the process of learning) in more controlled classroom situations; furthermore, it enables the teacher to assess just how well the students have mastered those skills. Used in this way, the free, spontaneous discussion is not a waste of time; however, it must be used sparingly and should seldom exceed a duration of 10 to 15 minutes.

Problem Solving, Games, and Other Group Activities

In addition to roleplays, question-and-answer activities,

and discussions, there are numerous other activities that can be used to teach conversation skills and to promote the use of conversation in the ESL classroom. These activities include games, problem-solving activities, strip stories, and "operations". In most of these activities, there is some task facing the students, and while their attention is on solving the problem or accomplishing the task, they are actually engaging in meaningful communication with one another and practicing conversation skills.

The value of using group activities to promote learning has been documented. Shaw (1976) has proven that groups learn faster than individuals, both in natural and in contrived situations. Small-group activities have also been used successfully to teach ESL (LaForge 1976). Students working in groups tend to take more risks and are not as intimidated as they might be in a traditional classroom setting, because while the groups are working, the attention of the teacher or of the class is not focused on any one student.

Some of the most recent ESL textbooks are based on the problem-solving approach to language learning, with an emphasis on the role of the group. Carver and Fotinos (1977) emphasize the importance of self-directed learning. "The teacher's goal should be to move the focus of the class away from herself or himself as the traditional head of the class, and toward the group as the primary source of knowledge and the basis for individualized information sharing" (p. ix).

Knowles and Sasaki (1980) have also designed materials for speaking activities based on a problem-solving approach. Their working assumption is that "a language is best learned in the process of using it--not that a language is first learned and then used....By using a language we mean the communication of meaning, accurately and comfortably, not just the correct manipulation of linguistic forms and sounds" (p. ix). Their materials are designed so that students must communicate to solve the problems.

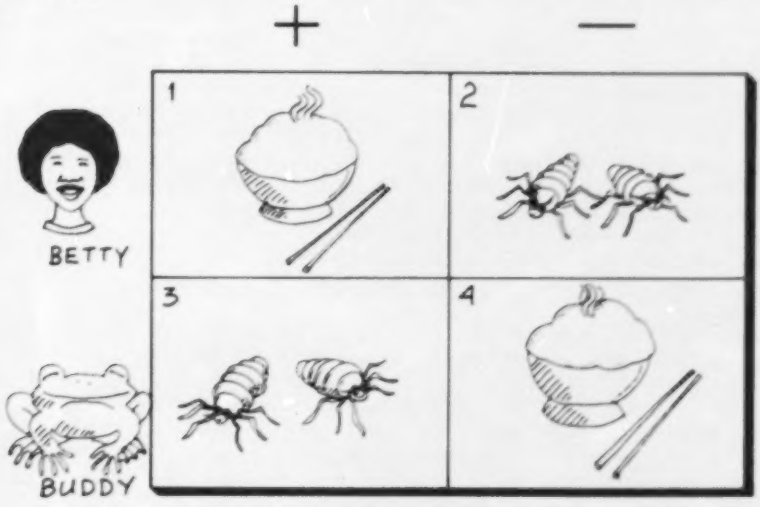
A similar philosophy is stated by Sandberg and Steinmetz (1980): "Meaning should precede form, or more exactly, the desire to express or extract meaning should precede and prepare the presentation and practice of structures....This sequence departs from the view that much practice with the manipulation of form must precede attempts to use English in a meaningful or communicative way" (p. x).

One might assume that group activities are appropriate only for advanced ESL students skilled in free conversation. This is not at all the case. Group activities have been used with low-level and intermediate students quite effectively. Sourcebooks of teacher-made materials such as Communication-Starters (Olsen 1977) and ESL Teaching Techniques I and II (Ruhl 1978, 1979), in addition to providing many practical suggestions for involving small groups in communication exercises, indicate that even

beginning students can benefit from group activities. Such activities can also be divided into our three basic categories of controlled, semicontrolled, and free.

Controlled Group Activities

Knowles and Sasaki (1980) offer a series of drawings that can be used to focus on specific pronunciation problems or grammatical structures as the students communicate with one another in pairs or in small groups. Their textbook, Story Squares: Fluency in English as a Second Language, contains pictorial grids or squares that are used to elicit statements, questions and answers, and stories. The first fluency square is reprinted below:



Students are expected to convey the information that Betty likes rice; she doesn't like lice; Buddy likes lice; he doesn't like rice. The cues at the side of the square (Who? What? Yes-No? Or?) indicate that the students are then to figure out how to ask questions based on the information in the square (e.g., "Who likes rice? What does Buddy like? Does Betty like lice? Does Buddy like rice or lice?"). While they are engaged in making statements, asking questions, and giving responses, the students also have a chance to practice pronunciation contrasts (lice/rice, Betty/Buddy) and the formation of questions and negatives using do or does.

Although this particular example is designed for low-level students, the fluency square format can be used for intermediate or advanced classes, depending on the complexity of the language needed to describe the pictures. Using six pictures, for exam-

ple, Knowles and Sasaki show how to elicit conditional statements about three people:

1. John has to use a cane to walk.
2. He wishes he didn't have to use one.
3. Jan has to pay two dollars admission if she wants to get inside.
4. She wishes it didn't cost anything at all.
5. Jane had better jump, or she'll be burned in the fire.

Other controlled group activities may be presented in the form of games. Carver and Fotinos (1977b) suggest two circle games that involve counting money and are appropriate for low-level students. In the first game, the teacher displays some money and asks a student to count it. After the student has given a satisfactory response, the teacher changes the amount and asks another student to count it. The game continues in this way around the circle. In the second circle game, the teacher again presents some money. This time the first student in the circle is asked, "How much money is this?" After the first student has responded, he or she is allowed to adjust the amount and then turn to the next student and ask the same question. The game continues in this fashion around the circle. Although these two games, like all games, are contrived, they stimulate real communication between teacher and students and among students.

Nelson and Winters (1980) propose the use of "operations" as a classroom activity to use language in a purposeful, functional manner. Students work in pairs or in small groups. One student reads the instructions for carrying out an operation while another student actually carries out the instructions. An operation as simple as touching one's toes can be used with low-level classes, because the vocabulary and the number of steps in the process are limited:

Touching Your Toes

1. Stand up.
2. Place your feet a foot apart.
3. Raise your arms up over your head.
4. Bend down from the waist.
5. Touch your toes with your fingers.
6. Keep your knees straight.
7. Return to a standing position.

During each operation activity, students will probably need to ask for more information, or for clarification or restatement of the directions. In this way, real communication invariably takes place. After students have taken turns giving and following directions, they may ask each other questions, talk about

what they have done, or make up an operation of their own. These operations teach the use of imperatives and are good for practicing the language of process.

Olsen (1977), offering ideas for holiday activities, suggests a reordering task for teaching sequencing to beginning or low-intermediate classes:

Make a Popcorn Chain

These directions are mixed up. Number them in the right order.

___ When the popping stops, pour the popcorn into a large bowl and let it cool.

___ Put a little oil in a pot and heat it on the stove.

___ Buy a can of popcorn at the store. (Note: Have the actual can in class to show the students what it looks like.)

___ When the chain is long enough, hang it on the Christmas tree.

___ Put a little popcorn in the pot and cover it with a lid.

___ String popcorn on the thread, one piece at a time, to make a chain.

___ When the corn starts popping, hold the pot by the handle and lid and shake it gently. (Use potholders, because it will be hot.)

___ Take a needle and thread it with a long thread.

Although this holiday activity may seem child oriented, adults usually enjoy it. The values of the activity are that it teaches an aspect of our culture; it introduces new and interesting vocabulary; it provides a situation in which to practice simple grammatical structures; it emphasizes the importance of sequencing; and it fosters social interaction.

Semicontrolled Group Activities

The strip story is another activity that can be used to give students the opportunity to use oral language in the classroom while focusing on the significance of sequencing. Lemelin (1977) explains how to structure the activity: (1) The teacher chooses a story or anecdote that has the same number of sentences as there are students. (2) Each sentence is printed or

typed on 3" x 5" cards. (3) The teacher distributes one card to each student, who then has one minute to memorize his or her sentence. (4) The teacher then collects the cards and instructs the students to find out what the story is, without writing down anything. At this point, the teacher becomes virtually silent as the students engage in conversation in order to discover the sequence of the story.

Obviously this activity encourages accurate pronunciation and the use of various conversational strategies (asking questions, requesting clarification, etc.). The activity is concluded when the students are able to repeat the story in sequence to the teacher.

A similar approach is used by Boyd and Boyd (1980) in Alice Blows a Fuse. The book contains a series of conversations about Alice and her friends as they deal with such everyday problems as calling a repairman, going to the dentist, getting locked out, buying an ice cream cone, etc. The advantage of using conversations for strip stories is that it is possible to provide authentic models of "real" language appropriate for a variety of situations. The conversations include idiomatic expressions ("Now you've done it!"), conversational fillers ("Well, if you'll run and get it..."), reductions ("You mean you don't know where your fuse box is?"), and informal interjections ("Darn!" and "Oh, heck!"). In each lesson of ten to twelve conversational utterances, the students are asked to reconstruct the strip story by choosing a logical sequence for the utterances. Sequencing the stories requires the students not only to read the strips aloud but also to reason with one another in order to justify their choice of sequence.

The game of charades can also be used as a semicontrolled group activity. To begin the game, especially with low-level students, the teacher should give each student a card or piece of paper with an activity written on it: "taking a bath," "flying an airplane," "driving a bus," "fixing a pizza," etc. As each student acts out an activity, the others make guesses in the form of yes/no questions: "Are you taking a bath?" or "Are you washing clothes?" The actor can respond with a nod or a shake of the head. After only one or two rounds, the students, working in groups, should be able to make up their own charades, at which time the teacher will probably have to help with vocabulary and spelling. This is a good game to use for practicing the present continuous tense.

Another group activity game involves the students in some detective work (Ruhl 1978). First, the teacher plants various "clues" around the room before the students arrive: a half-eaten sandwich, an ashtray with cigarette butts, a dirty glass, an empty lunch bag, etc. When the students enter the classroom, the teacher explains that he or she needs some detectives to help search for clues: "Aha! There's an empty glass. Someone has been drinking milk." The teacher invites the students to

find more clues and to use the structure "Someone has been ___ing." This game provides meaningful practice of the present perfect continuous tense. It also encourages students to engage in conversation while they search for clues.

Free Conversation Group Activities

There are a number of games and problem-solving exercises that can be used to encourage free conversation on a specific topic. Ruhl (1978) suggests having students plan a vacation, either in pairs or in small groups. The teacher provides students with a number of travel brochures, maps, and transportation schedules. In order to get them started, she suggests writing these questions on the board:

1. When will you go?
2. How long will your vacation be?
3. What form of transportation will you use? (bus, train, car, plane)
4. What route will you take?
5. Where will you stay? (campgrounds, hotels, motels)
6. Where will you eat? (restaurants, cook your own food)
7. How much money will you take?

After each group or individual has planned a vacation, the teacher should encourage students to ask one another for clarifications or details. For example:

1. Whom will you take with you?
2. What will you take with you?
3. What kind of money will you take? (checks, travelers' checks, cash)

Advanced students may want to ask speculative questions: "What will you do if ___ (you have a flat tire, it rains, someone steals your money)?"

Another free conversation group activity is called "Picture Dominoes" (Rixon 1979). Instead of having regular dominoes, players have cards bearing pictures of different objects (e.g., a cat, a dog, a table, a tree). Since all the pictures are quite different, the players must "invent" connections between them in order to be able to place one card next to another. For example, the picture of a dog could be placed next to a cat with the justification that "they are both pets (animals, mammals)." Next to the dog, a player could place the picture of the table "because they both have four legs." Next to the table comes a tree "because they are both made of wood." Any argument--however imaginative or ingenious--can be used, as long as the other players accept the justification. Since the aim of this game, as with regular dominoes, is to get rid of one's pieces as

quickly as possible, players may lay down two or more cards at a time in a chain of association. This tends to stimulate the other players to object to some of the "links" in order to stop one player from getting too far ahead. Furious negotiation can result.

Heringer (1979) suggests that a "whodunit" can provide the stimulus for free conversation. The teacher presents an unsolved mystery story to the class, either orally or in writing. A few suspicious characters, a midnight setting, and a body are necessary ingredients. The story can be as simple as that, or it can be made more complicated, depending on the proficiency of the students and the purposes of the teacher. Students can be divided into groups to discuss possible solutions to the mystery, or a role-playing approach can be used in which students pretend that they are detectives and ask questions about the circumstances of the murder and the events leading up to it:

1. Mr. X, do you keep any poisonous spiders in your laboratory?
2. How long have you kept poisonous spiders?
3. Did you check the cages on the night of the murder?

These are just a few suggestions. Each time a story is used, however, new possibilities develop naturally out of classroom demands and resources.

A treasure hunt can also provide many opportunities for free conversation (Condon 1979). Divide the students into groups and give each group the same list of items to find, either in the classroom or outdoors. For younger or beginning students, the teacher should read over the list of items with the entire class to make sure that learners understand the vocabulary. A time limit may be set for the groups to find the items. At the end of the time limit, or when the first group returns, everyone is called together. (The first group to return is not necessarily the winner.) Then the teacher and the learners check each item. Points are given for each correct item. Besides being engaged in conversation during the actual hunt, students must converse with the teacher when reporting the items they have found. For example:

Teacher: What is number 1?
Students: Something green.
Teacher: Group A, what do you have?
Group A: We have a green leaf.
Teacher: Group B, what do you have?
Group B: We have a green pen.

Points are deducted if the request is not satisfied, and the team with the most points wins the game.

Although there are many possibilities for group activities, the underlying philosophy of group work is always the same: students learn more effectively when they work together. At the same time, group activities give students opportunities to participate in meaningful conversation. By discussing ways to complete a task or to solve a problem, language learners must engage in social interaction and utilize various conversational strategies. Furthermore, group activities can provide a valuable format for introducing or for practicing vocabulary and grammatical structures or for focusing on pronunciation problems. Such activities enhance language learning because they stimulate students to actually use the language.

Foreign students in a domestic ESL program have numerous opportunities to practice conversation outside the classroom. They will not necessarily take full advantage of those opportunities, however, unless they understand conversational English and can negotiate at least several conversational strategies. For that reason, students should have practice in using conversations and developing conversational skills in the ESL class.

Furthermore, research indicates that the most successful adult language learners are those who learn a language to fill a functional need. That is, they acquire language skills in order to function in a particular situation. However, when learners feel that their language proficiency is adequate for their purposes, they stop learning; their language becomes "fossilized" (Selinker 1972). It is, therefore, extremely important that students believe that classroom activities are relevant to their perceived language needs. Because they are relevant, challenging, and enjoyable, conversation activities that emphasize real language can provide the motivation for language learners to continue learning.

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